
V. *Some Account of the Tantalus Ephouskyca, a rare American Bird.* By Benjamin Smith Barton, M.D. F.M.L.S.

Read June 6, 1815.

THE annexed figure (Tab. I.) of a rare American bird, together with those very few facts and circumstances which I have been able to collect concerning the bird, may, I flatter myself, prove acceptable to the Linnean Society. It may be proper to observe, that although the drawing, by my friend Mr. William Bartram, has been in my possession for many years, no engraving has ever been made from it.

We know little or nothing of this bird, but what has been communicated to us by the ingenious gentleman just mentioned. I here subjoin all that he has said concerning it.

“ There is inhabiting the low shores and swamps of this river*, and the lakes of Florida, as well as Georgia, a very curious bird, called by an Indian name, (Ephouskyca †,) which signifies in our language the Crying Bird. I cannot determine what genus of European birds to join it with. It is about the size of a large domestic hen. All the body, above and beneath, is of a dark lead colour, every feather edged or tipped with white, which makes the bird appear speckled on a near view: the eye is large, and placed high on the head, which is very prominent: the bill or beak is

* The St. Juan, in East Florida.

† “ *Tantalus pictus.*” In another part of his work (p. 293.) Mr. Bartram mentions our bird by the same name.



Tantalus Ephenskyra.

Waldell sc.

five or six inches in length, arched or bent gradually downwards, in that respect to be compared to one half of a bent bow: it is large or thick near the base, compressed on each side, and flatted at top and beneath, which makes it appear four-square for more than an inch, where the nostrils are placed, from whence to their tips both mandibles are round, gradually lessening or tapering to their extremities, which are thicker for about half an inch than immediately above, by which the mandibles never fit quite close their whole length: the upper mandible is a small matter longer than the under: the bill is of a dusky green colour, more bright and yellowish about the base and angles of the mouth. The tail is very short, and the middle feather the longest: the others on each side shorten gradually, and are of the colour of the rest of the bird, only somewhat darker: the two shortest or outermost feathers are perfectly white, which the bird has a faculty of flirting out on either side as quick as a flash of lightning, especially when he hears or sees any thing that disturbs him, uttering at the same instant an extreme harsh and loud shriek. His neck is long and slender; and his legs are also long, and bare of feathers above the knee, like those of the bittern, and are black, or of a dark lead colour*.”

It will be evident, I think, from an inspection of the drawing, that the *Ephouskyca* is a species of the genus *Tantalus* or *Ibis*; a genus of which America produces many species, several of which are now known to be natives of the United States. I cannot, however, find that the “Crying Bird” is noticed by any of the European ornithologists. I am pretty sure that it is not one of the nineteen species described by Mr. Latham in his *General Synopsis of Birds*. I may add, that our bird has entirely escaped

* Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, &c., by William Bartram, pp. 147, 148. Philadelphia, 1791.